

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE A-11

WASHINGTON TIMES
6 JANUARY 1983

Commentary

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Of Andropov and the pope

Although the press is doing its best to ignore the implications of recent disclosures concerning the attempted assassination of Pope John Paul II — and the Roman Catholic Church in the United States, which has been so vocal in advocating a nuclear freeze, has been silent on the subject — one most important question remains largely unasked. That is: did Yuri Andropov, in his capacity as head of the KGB, order the assassination of the pope?

This is a legitimate question for a number of reasons. Mehmet Ali Agca, the Turk who has been convicted of the shooting, now testifies that he was offered \$1.5 million to kill the pope and has implicated three Bulgarians in the assassination attempt. He identified the Bulgarians as Sergei Ivanov Antonov, former cashier at the embassy.

Agca, who earlier insisted that he acted alone, has told Italian investigators he was introduced to the three Bulgarians in Sofia. In an interview with the Italian weekly magazine, *Panorama*, Sen. Alphonse D'Amato said he has given the CIA information from a Vatican source that the Soviets were behind the plot. D'Amato said that the pope had written personally to the late Soviet leader, Leonid Brezhnev, saying that he would return to Poland if the Soviets invaded the country. "That the pope wrote to Brezhnev in very firm terms is a sure fact. It was confirmed to me personally by the monsignor who brought the letter to Moscow and then returned to get the response from the Kremlin," the magazine quoted D'Amato as saying. "It was a hand-written letter, in Russian, by the pope himself. If the Russians would invade Poland, the letter said, the pope would return to be by the

This information, of course, provides sufficient motive for Moscow to have sought to remove Pope John Paul II from the scene. Until Nov. 25, when Italian authorities arrested Sergei Antonov on charges of "active complicity" in the assassination attempt, there was no concrete evidence that Soviet bloc agents were involved. The circumstantial evidence, however, even prior to that date seemed overwhelming — and was largely downplayed by both the press and the church — as well as by Western governments.

One who immediately pointed her finger at Moscow was Claire Sterling, author of the book "The Terror Network," and one of the world's leading authorities on terrorism. Discussing the fact that Agca had spent a good deal of time in Bulgaria, had forged documents and enough money to live a life of luxury, she wrote: "To have stayed in Bulgaria for some 50 days, as Agca did, is enough in itself to raise suspicions about his future actions. Apart from the Soviet Union, Bulgaria is Europe's most inflexible communist police state; it is also one of Moscow's principal surrogates for terrorism and subversion. Bulgaria has serviced Western Europe's terrorist bands since the early 1970s, providing guerrilla-training facilities and a sanctuary, and acting as a prime staging area for trans-shipment of Soviet-bloc weapons.... One of Bulgaria's more pressing assignments for the Soviet Union has been to help destabilize neighboring Turkey. The Bulgarian secret service knows everything about Turks crossing the frontier, legally or otherwise. No Turk could loiter for long unobserved

in Sofia, the capital — especially not somebody like Agca... a convicted murderer whose picture had been featured on Turkey's front pages for weeks on end."

According to Agca's own account, he entered Bulgaria on a forged Indian passport as Yoginder Singh. He stayed at several expensive tourists hotels before checking into the deluxe Hotel Vitosha. There, he obtained the 9mm Browning he used to shoot the pope and also was given a perfectly counterfeited passport issued to "Farouk Ozgun" from someone whose name he says he does not remember. Miss Sterling declares, "The passport was given to Agca in Sofia under circumstances directly implicating the Bulgarian secret service. The passport was stamped at Edirne on Aug. 30 with a Turkish exit visa. That visa was fake. But the Bulgarian entry stamp, dated Aug. 31, was valid. Thus someone must have smuggled the passport from Turkey to Bulgaria — someone who did not match Agca's photograph on the passport but who was able to have it stamped on the Bulgarian side. A courier must have rushed the passport to Agca in Sofia, since he used it to leave for Yugoslavia that very day."

U.S. intelligence officials note that Bulgaria is one of the Soviets' most obedient allies and that Moscow knows everything that is going on in Bulgaria with regard to security questions. Bulgarian intelligence, it

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